



# Brothers-In-Arms Memorial Project

p.a. Westrozebekestraat 41a  
8980 Passendale  
Belgium

[www.brothersinarmsmemorial.org](http://www.brothersinarmsmemorial.org)

## BROTHERS IN ARMS MEMORIAL PROJECT

It is without doubt the worst nightmare of any parent: losing a child. Still, all too often we see that parents have to lay their children in the grave. Also during the First World War this was rife, with over 9 million dead at the end of the Great War. Losing one son was sad, but lots of parents lost more than one son in the First World War.

The Smith family from Barnard Castle lost 5 of the 6 sons in the trenches of the First World War. Completely torn apart by grief also the father died in 1918. The last surviving son would by intervention from Buckingham Palace and the War Office be sent home. He would live to the age of 72 and have 5 children.

Also Amy Beechey from Lincoln lost 5 out of 8 sons in the war. When she was received by King George V and Queen Mary in April 1918, the Queen thanked Amy for her sacrifice. Amy replied swiftly: "It was no sacrifice at all, madam. I never wanted them to go."

Annie Souls from Great Rissington in The Cotswolds lost 5 of her 6 sons, too. Her son Frederick is still missing. As long as Annie was alive, she burnt a candle at the window, hoping her son would find his way home.



And of course this is not a purely English story! Canadian Charlotte Wood from Winnipeg saw 5 sons get killed and 2 sons return heavily wounded from the war. The Australian brothers Theo, George and William Seabrook from Sidney (see picture) were killed on 20th September 1917 during their very first action in the Battle of the Menin Road. It would be their first, but also their last attack. William was buried at Lysenthoek Cemetery, the two others were listed as missing on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing. Irish couple Thomas and Agnes Collins waved goodbye to 6 sons. After the campaigns in the Somme and in Flanders, only 1 son returned. 4 sons were killed, 1 went missing. Also the story of the youngest German war casualty is one of brotherly love: Walther and Paul Mauk volunteered in August 1914. Paul, born on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1900, would die of his wounds, sustained from shrapnel on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1915. His brother Walther was sitting with him when he died.

During the Gallipoli campaign no less than 196 pairs of brothers were killed. Only 13 of those men have got a known grave. The men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Newfoundland Regiment lost in total 255 killed, 386 wounded and 91 missing in the attack on Beaumont-Hamel on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916. Among the dead were 14 pairs of brothers.



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All these tragic stories relate to brothers who were actually all killed. But lots of men saw one or more brothers get killed in the war, although they did not always join the same regiments or battalions. Up until now no in depth research about these family tragedies has been conducted...

## A bit of history: the Zonnebeke Five

In 2006 the bodies of 5 Australian soldiers were found on Westhoek Ridge. The graves were discovered by coincidence, while installing a new gas pipe line along the road. Tom Heyman, the man operating the machine, immediately realized the importance of the find and called Johan Vandewalle, an expert on WW1 with several archaeological digs on his account. Johan Vandewalle immediately contacted police and the local council at Zonnebeke. After requesting an archaeological excavation through official channels, the person assigned to the excavation by Archeo 7 was... Johan Vandewalle. It would be an experience to remember for the Flemish expert on underground warfare in WW1. The fifth grave contained an extremely well preserved body that through DNA analysis turned out to be John Hunter, who had been buried there by his younger brother Jim.



John Hunter was the eldest of 7 sons of Henry and Emily Hunter from Nanango, Queensland. Father Henry's health was deteriorating and the boys needed to help out in the sawmill their father ran. 25-

year-old Jim wanted to join the military to fight in Europe. He volunteered on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1916. As older brother (and close friend) John thought it his duty to protect his younger brother and volunteered as well two days later. John and Jim left Sydney aboard HMAT Ayrshire on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1917. They were drafted to the 49<sup>th</sup> battalion, a unit that consisted of mostly Queenslanders. They sailed to Egypt to complete their training and were taken to France nearly a year later. Jim was quickly promoted to lance corporal, but was satisfied with the rank of private if he could stay with his elder brother John.

49<sup>th</sup> Battalion was sent up to the front line for the Battle of Polygon Wood. At dawn they would attack, but just before the attack started, John was sent out to investigate a piece of shiny metal in no-man's land. As John crawled out, he was re-percussed by an artillery shell and was severely wounded. He managed to crawl back to the own trenches, but died in his brother's arms. Jim had to go in for the attack, but later brought the body of his elder brother John to a temporary cemetery at Westhoek and buried him with his own hands. He lovingly and carefully covered the body with the typical ground sheet, so it would well preserve. Jim promised to come back after the war and take the human remains of his elder brother John back to Australia. He did indeed return in 1918, only to see that the terrain was so badly destroyed by artillery shelling that he had no idea where the graves were, and he had no idea where to start digging for the body.



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Also Jim was wounded later on in the war, one of those wounds sustained in a gas attack. He managed to survive the hell, though, and returned to Australia. Back home he married Esme Margaret Bulter, with whom he had 6 children. When a dementing Jim drew his last breath, he called out the name of his brother who lay buried in a faraway place called Flanders Fields.

The name of John Hunter was listed on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing in 1927, but through DNA research the body could be identified in 2007. It was Mollie Millis, a niece of John, who provided the matching DNA. 90 years after date John was reburied with full military honour at Buttes New British Cemetery in Polygon Wood, together with the other 4 soldiers that were excavated by Johan Vandewalle and his team.

The story of the two brothers led to the Brothers-In-Arms Memorial Project. As Johan wanted to reunite the souls of the brothers, he came up with the idea to erect a memorial to honour all the brothers who were killed in the First World War.

## Who Are We?

Brothers-In-Arms Memorial Project was founded as a non-profit organisation to erect a memorial to honour all brothers who fought together in the Great War, but did not return home together.

Within the organisation - started by some WW1 enthusiasts and battlefield guides - the idea is to do research on the stories of the many brothers who fought in the Great War and - in some cases - died together. To commemorate all these dead and the many families still mourning the loss of a whole generation, we would like to erect a memorial. The Brothers-In-Arms Memorial will be a full memorial park with a statue of one soldier dying in his brother's arms in a central position. We do not intend to focus solely on the story of John and Jim Hunter, but would like to emphasize that the image is a universal one and commemorates all brothers who died in the First World War.

The Board of Directors of Brothers-In-Arms Memorial vzw consist of:

- ▶ Johan Vandewalle, project coordinator
- ▶ Wouter Feys, chairman
- ▶ Peter Vansteenkiste, vice chairman
- ▶ Bert Degrauwe, secretary
- ▶ Alexander Reynaert, treasurer
  
- ▶ Geert Brouckaert
- ▶ Donald Buyze
- ▶ Stephane Debevere
- ▶ Koen Descheemaeker
- ▶ Luc Dutoit
- ▶ Filip Landuyt
- ▶ Jozef Vantomme
- ▶ Bart Vermeulen



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## Presentation of the Project

We are happy to officially invite you to the project presentation on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2016. The presentation will take place in De Dreve, the tavern owned by Johan Vandewalle. With a delicious cup of coffee or tea and some biscuits aside, we will present the project to you in full detail.

Afterwards you can also visit the brand new permanent exposition made by Johan Vandewalle on the Underground War and the many excavations that Johan did.

We will be happy to welcome you at 11 am on the following address:

Taverne De Dreve  
Lange Dreef 16  
8980 Zonnebeke  
Belgium

May we kindly ask to confirm your presence by email to [info@brothersinarmsmemorial.org](mailto:info@brothersinarmsmemorial.org)?

With the utmost gratitude!

Wouter Feys  
chairman